

September 19, 1944

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COMMUNITY CANNING CENTERS

By Division of Subject Matter

General Background

The People:

The canning centers of Duval County, Florida, are the result of 17 years of development. They are the work of the women of the county, the county home demonstration agent, the home demonstration clubs, and the Board of County Commissioners.

In 1930, the county had a population of 155,503. Of this number, 135,136 were included in the City of Jacksonville. The present population of the county is estimated at 285,000 and the population of Jacksonville is approximately 246,000. The division into urban and rural in the county is more apparent than real. It would be an error to regard every nonurban domicile as the home of a farmer and his family. Many of the small homes, situated near one or another of the numerous highways, house urban workers who have never been farmers. Many of these workers are mechanics or skilled laborers quite innocent of the slightest agricultural knowledge or inclination. Many of the nonurban dwellers are fishermen. There are some real farmers - very good ones - but Duval County is not primarily a region of general farming.

The most important agricultural activities in Duval County are dairying, truck crops and poultry raising. The bulk of the agricultural crops is marketed in Jacksonville for consumption there. A large farmers' market provides facilities for the produce dealers and for the farmers. Fruits, such as apples, are brought in by truck from other States and when the load is disposed of, the trucks are loaded for the return trip with Florida-grown fruits or vegetables. The retail department of this market affords to persons in Jacksonville unusual opportunities to purchase in quantity foods for canning.

There is no problem of language or nationality. Jacksonville is cosmopolitan in that its citizens originated in all parts of the United States and Canada. Some are from Europe, some from Cuba, but there is no foreign quarter, and English is spoken by all. There is a large negro population in Jacksonville (61,783), engaged mostly in industrial and other nonagricultural work.

The Problem:

One day a farm family near Jacksonville called the home demonstration agent of Duval County and asked for help on canning corn. The family had canned corn for several years but had lost it through spoilage each year. The home demonstration agent worked all day with poor heating equipment, climbed up and down rickety steps to a kettle that was heated by a wood fire in the backyard, and lifted heavy containers until her arms ached.

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- /1 One of a series of case histories prepared for use in the conference To Outline the Contribution of Extension Methods and Techniques Toward the Rehabilitation of War-torn Countries, held in Washington, D. C., September 19 to 22, 1944. Extension Service and Office of Foreign Agricultural Relations cooperating.

It was clear to the home demonstration agent that farm women needed a place to can their food without the drudgery and the lack of safety and sanitation that prevailed in many farm homes. More knowledge about methods of canning was also sadly needed.

Analysis of the Situation and Possible Solution:

Prior to 1930 very little home canning was done. Surplus fruits and vegetables were disposed of mainly through the Jacksonville markets. This helped to increase income but deprived the family of much needed fruits and vegetables in the diets.

Among the things needed in Duval County were better facilities for taking care of surplus fresh fruits and vegetables needed for home use and more knowledge of how to do it. The canning center appeared to be the solution.

Planning:

The first canning center, a small one with one gas plate and two pressure cookers, was opened at 111 Market Street in Jacksonville in 1927. The home demonstration agent first conducted the canning center. The kitchen was also used as a center for giving other types of food demonstrations, as a community center for home demonstration clubs, P.T.A. groups, Red Cross, and for community suppers.

Women who came to the center to can were taught how to can and how to use the equipment. Only family-size cookers and sealers were placed in the center for this reason.

In setting up plans for the canning centers, equal opportunities were provided for all. A schedule or plan was worked out for each day's work in the canning kitchen, designed to prevent overcrowding. It proved feasible and practicable to permit white and negro women to carry on their work simultaneously.

Sequence of Events:

The community canning center idea spread rapidly. The farm women came to can and the canning center also became a place for demonstrations and other teaching. The cannery was popular because farm families preserved their fruits and vegetables with much less effort than at home. At the same time, they visited with neighbors or made new friends from other neighborhoods, and 111 Market became a social center for farm families, as well as their cannery. Families living in Jacksonville soon learned about the cannery and many of them came regularly. Two additional "emergency" canneries were opened in Jacksonville.

As the idea of canning centers became more popular, the home demonstration club women in Duval County set up other centers that would be more convenient to their communities. Scattered about in the county, at strategically located places, are 12 other centers, all with the same plan of operation. Each community center is housed in a building erected through the efforts of the local home demonstration club. During the canning season a paid director and supervisor for each center are employed by the Board of County Commissioners. These supervisors are, without exception, members of the local home demonstration club who have shown special aptitude for the work.

The buildings are really small community centers, where church socials, parties, and community recreational activities are centered. They are equipped to function as emergency feeding centers, and as Red Cross canteen centers. They have become a part of a permanent community center.

There are two centers, one at 111 Market Street, and the other at the County Prison Farm, that are housed in county-owned buildings. The others are all owned and controlled by the home demonstration clubs in the community. These are the groups that are conscious of getting their centers. They secured the land and erected the buildings. Money was raised through fairs, community meals, square dances, etc.

The canning centers are operated under the guidance of the council of home demonstration work consisting of the president of each local home demonstration club, and of one delegate elected from each club. The Board of Commissioners of Duval County purchased and supplied all equipment for the centers and pays the salaries of the supervisors.

Evaluation of Results:

In 1943 the community canning centers of Duval County were used by 3,000 families who canned a total of 230,932 pints of food. In addition, training in food conservation was provided to these families at the same time.

Some families have developed a preference for canning in the centers instead of their own kitchens, so that gradually they have adopted the practice of doing the bulk of their canning in the centers. Many others have purchased small units and do their work in the homes.

The net result of the canning program is better health for the county. This is especially true of the county's negroes, who learn the various ways of preparing the vegetables they can while putting them up.

Almost every householder has become food conscious. There is no group of people not interested. In the community canning centers of Duval County can be seen wives of farmers, lawyers, doctors, and of business men.

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Expenditures of Money:

In 1913 the community centers of Davis County were used by 2,000 families who consumed a total of 250,000 pounds of food. In addition, training in food conservation was provided to these families at the same time.

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